

WYOMING 2012 STATEWIDE HUNTING SEASON FORECAST



PRONGHORN (antelope)

JACKSON REGION

In the Jackson Region, northern portions of the Sublette antelope herd include Hunt Areas 85 and 86. Although hunter success is good, Hunt Area 85 (Gros Ventre) offers very limited hunting opportunities. There will only be 15 licenses offered for the season. Hunt Area 86 (Hoback) has seen an increase in antelope during the past several years. However, hunter access is limited and the majority of the hunting opportunities are located on private lands in the Boundurant area.

CODY REGION

Most pronghorn populations in the southern Bighorn Basin are at or near their population objective, and we are again offering doe/fawn licenses throughout many of those herd units to address potential damage problems on private lands. Hunters are being encouraged to purchase some of these additional doe/fawn licenses to help address herd population growth as well as to reduce numbers on some private lands. Hunting for pronghorns in 2012 should be similar to 2011 in the southern Big Horn Basin and good in the remainder of the Basin. Due to the harsher than normal conditions of the 2010/11 winter, some areas will see slight reductions in licenses while other areas will see slight increases in licenses, but overall pronghorn hunting should be good. After being above population objectives for several years, pronghorn populations in the extreme northern portion of the Bighorn Basin have been reduced and as a result permit levels for the 2012 season will be reduced also. Damage issues on private lands have been resolved and there is less need for doe/fawn harvest.

SHERIDAN REGION

The outlook for antelope hunting in most of the Sheridan Region is pretty good. Northeast Wyoming has abundant herds of antelope. Antelope populations are still at high levels in several herd units, so hunting seasons have been designed to give hunters plenty of opportunity in those areas. However, in those hunt areas north of Gillette and Moorcroft antelope populations are lower than a few years ago, so license numbers have been reduced. In the Sheridan Region antelope hunt areas, hunters are allowed to purchase a second any antelope license and up to four doe/fawn licenses. However, potential hunters need to be aware that most antelope hunting is found on private land and they should make arrangements for a place to hunt prior to buying licenses. Hunters willing to wait until after the opening day and first weekend of the season may find it easier to get on private lands. It is possible to find some antelope on the parcels of public lands scattered around northeast Wyoming, but hunters can expect to find other hunters also using those lands. Because of crop damage issues, Hunt Areas 22 and 102 near Buffalo will once again have early rifle doe/fawn seasons beginning September 1 in portions of the hunt areas.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Pronghorn populations and hunting opportunity will vary throughout the Green River Region depending on herd status and management objectives. Many of the pronghorn populations in the Green River Region were significantly affected by the 2010-11 winter and as a result, had lower fawn production during the 2012 summer. In general, seasons are similar to or more conservative throughout the region (Areas 53, 57, 58, 59, 92, 93, 96, and 112) and remain more

liberal in two herd units, the Carter Lease and Uinta-Cedar Mountain (Areas 94, 95, 98, 99, and 100). Hunters will find less opportunity for both “any antelope” or “doe-fawn antelope” hunting in Areas 53, 92, 93, and 96. Remaining areas are either unchanged from 2011 or show increases in licenses (areas 94 and 99). Hunters in Area 94 are reminded to obtain a permission slip from Western Wyoming Range, Limited Partnership before accessing private lands.

LARAMIE REGION

Pronghorn populations are doing well in the Laramie Region but drought conditions may concentrate animals on irrigated habitat or around available water. Much of the land in southeastern Wyoming is privately owned which limits access in some areas. Consequently, hunters should be cautious when purchasing leftover licenses in those areas identified as having limited access. Healthy populations and good buck ratios will provide ample opportunity in those areas where hunters can find a place to hunt. Hunters should refer to BLM maps to determine which areas contain public land. Access for pronghorn hunting on private land in the region continues to improve, but can still be problematic. Private Land/Public Wildlife (PLPW) Hunter Management Areas and numerous Walk-in Areas provide access opportunities for pronghorn hunters on private and public lands throughout the region.

LANDER REGION

Pronghorn populations are down throughout the Lander Region. Of the Region’s 7 pronghorn herds where we’re able to estimate population size, 2 were above and 5 were below objective levels after the 2011 hunting season. To date, pronghorn classifications are revealing fawn productivity, yearling buck ratios, and the overall numbers of pronghorn are down. In some areas they are down significantly and attributable to the extreme drought conditions experienced throughout the region. Buck quality, again given the drought conditions, is down somewhat. Nevertheless, mature buck ratios are still quite good and hunters should expect good harvest success. Again, in all likelihood, hunter success will remain high in 2012, but the number of “quality” bucks will be down.

CASPER REGION

Pronghorn hunting throughout the Casper Region in 2012 will be good in most areas, but will not be as good as the excellent years the region experienced for much of the past decade. Due to elevated winter losses from the 2010-2011 winter and subsequent poor fawn production, hunters will not see the high densities of pronghorn that were commonly observed through 2010. Appropriate license reductions were made in an effort to sustain hunter success rates and continued quality hunting opportunities. In general, hunters should expect to see fewer numbers of pronghorn throughout the Casper Region. Pronghorn numbers in Thunder Basin and much of the Cheyenne River drainage between Lusk and Newcastle remain at especially low levels following the relatively harsh winter of 2010-2011. Hunters in southern Niobrara County should expect good success along Highway 18-20, although local managers report pronghorn densities will not be as high as they have been in recent years. In this area, good hunter access to private lands through the Department’s Private Land/Public Wildlife (PLPW) access program continues to provide outstanding opportunity. The western portion of the Casper region is a mixed bag. Pronghorn numbers to the south and east of Casper remain near average levels, while in areas to the west, northwest, and northeast, hunters will see far fewer pronghorn than they have been accustomed to in recent years. As with northern Niobrara and Converse counties and southern Weston County, elevated winter losses, coupled with poor fawn production and survival, have resulted in significant population reductions in much of the Casper area.

While overall buck availability will be down compared to recent levels in most areas within the Casper Region, buck quality should be quite good. Extremely mild weather during 2011-2012 winter and 2012 spring enabled pronghorn to devote much of their energy to horn growth as the energetic demands for thermoregulation were not as high as normal. Given the majority of horn growth occurs during the winter and early spring months for pronghorn, bucks were able to get a good head start with the mild weather. As a result, hunters should expect to see bigger bucks than in the recent past, especially in areas west of Casper.

PINEDALE REGION

In the Pinedale Region, northern portions of the Sublette antelope herd include hunt areas 85-90. Population estimates for this herd are slightly below desired levels. The lower elevation sagebrush communities throughout the region are in very poor condition due to lack of snowpack and spring moisture in 2012. Ephemeral leaves are already dropping from sagebrush plants and preliminary data on annual leader production documents less than a quarter inch of new growth. Additionally, herbaceous production is very poor throughout much of the lower elevations. Lack of typical water sources and poor forage quality has caused pronghorn to search harder for food and water and has contributed to poorer body condition and pronghorn distribution away from some typically used habitats. The 2012 fawn production totaled 73:100, above the 5 year average (2007-2011) of 61:100. The total buck:doe ratio of 66:100 was higher than 2011 (59:100) and 2010 (62:100). Based on below average snow accumulation this past winter, and observations from this summer's surveys, the 2011-2012 winter mortality for adult pronghorn was "below normal" on most of the winter range complexes.

For the 2012 hunting season, the Pinedale Region reduced permit levels. 2012 Type 6 doe and fawn permits were reduced by 425 throughout the 6 hunt areas in the Pinedale Region. The permit reductions should stabilize the population at present levels.

DEER

JACKSON REGION

The Wyoming Range deer herd is designated as a special management strategy herd which focuses on providing high quality hunting opportunities, mature age class deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45: 100). Deer numbers stabilized in 2011-2012 after above average winter mortality was observed in 2010-11. Good winter survival of all age and sex classes of deer was observed this spring. The mild winter conditions and early spring greenup resulted in significant antler growth in early April, which is at least one month earlier than two years ago. As a result, hunters may notice bucks with improved antler growth this hunting season.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 14 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. Youth license holders will be able to take any deer Oct. 1-14., while general license deer hunters will be able to take antlered only deer Oct. 1-12. General license, antlered only deer hunting will run from September 15 - October 5 for Hunt Areas 143-145.

The 2012 nonresident quota for Region G was reduced from 800 to 600 licenses.

The Targhee deer herd is a small population on the west side of the Teton Mountain Range that is managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Population growth of this herd is limited by winter range and habitat fragmentation from residential developments. Most crucial winter ranges are situated in Idaho and options to allow this population to grow are limited. In 2011, hunters reported a meager 11% success rate. Proposed hunting seasons in 2012 include a general license season for antlered deer from September 15 through October 5.

CODY REGION

Mule deer hunting should be good on the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River. The effect of mild fall weather during the 2011 hunting season resulted in a lower buck harvest than the 5-year-average. In addition, no significant mortality was documented for the past winter, although it was colder and snowier than the norm. Generally, buck deer will be available to hunters in 2012 compared to previous seasons (if weather conditions trigger migrations prior to the end of the hunting season). Recent poor fawn crops should not noticeably affect the total availability of adult bucks in the 2012 season, as postseason buck:doe ratios in these herds were good in 2011. Low fawn production and increased antlerless harvest in the recent past has brought deer numbers to objective levels, and as a result antlerless deer hunting opportunities will be reduced in some areas for 2012.

Significant changes were made in Hunt Areas 105 and 106 in 2008, as the November general license seasons were replaced with a limited quota season. This was done to reduce the harvest of buck deer and maintain additional older age class bucks in the population. Another mild fall caused fewer deer to migrate, resulting in fewer bucks killed and an increase in buck:doe ratios and more mature bucks available to hunters. Opportunities to harvest a mature buck deer in Hunt Areas 105 and 106 will be good in both the later portion of the general season and the November limited quota season in 2012. Recent changes in hunting season structures should also increase the percentage of older age class bucks in Hunt Area 109. Due to agricultural damage, opportunities to harvest an antlerless deer in areas between Cody and Powell have been expanded in Hunt Area 121. Doe/fawn tags were increased for areas near Powell, Greybull, Hyattville, Burlington, and Lovell to address damage on agricultural lands.

On the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains buck numbers have been holding steady for three years. If snowstorms hit in September, as they have done the last two falls, bucks should move down from high elevation summer ranges and may be more accessible. Similar to pronghorn, doe deer harvest is necessary to control the number of deer on private land, especially in croplands. If you have a doe/fawn license for private lands, please contact the local Game & Fish warden for information on where to hunt to help reduce crop damage. For the southern portion of the Big Horn Basin, mule deer hunting for 2012 should be fair. Because of concerns over declining mule deer numbers in some areas, doe/fawn license quotas were adjusted accordingly, along with slight declines in Type 1 licenses and the Region M nonresident quota. There are still a few deer around, and as long as you put a little effort into it, you should be able to harvest a deer or two. For deer Hunt Areas 52 and 53 the opening date now runs from Oct. 15 to Oct. 31th. The 2012 deer regulation brochure improperly lists Hunt Areas 52 and 53 as only being open from Oct. 25 to Oct. 31.

SHERIDAN REGION

Deer hunting in the Sheridan Region is again forecasted to be about average in much of the region with less than average conditions in the northeast part of the region. Deer hunters in areas around Gillette and Moorcroft can expect to see fewer deer than they did a couple of years ago. Hunters with access to private lands are expected to continue to have high success, while hunters on public lands can expect large numbers of hunters and comparatively lower success. Antler growth and body condition of deer appears to be pretty good in those areas where deer have had access to better forage during this dry summer. There will likely be some real nice trophy bucks harvested this fall in the Sheridan Region. Hunters are advised if they have access to private land they should consider buying reduced price doe/fawn deer licenses as several thousand doe/fawn licenses are available throughout the region with many of them restricted to private lands. Several deer hunt areas from Sheridan to Kaycee opened to doe/fawn rifle hunting beginning on September 1 to address crop damage issues. In Hunt Areas 24, 27, 29, 30, or 33 a person can again purchase an unlimited number of doe/fawn deer licenses until the quota is exhausted.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Hunters will have a tough time hunting mule deer throughout the majority of the Green River Region due to winter severity and increased winter mortality. This is particularly true in the southern Wyoming Range, the Uinta, and Steamboat herd units. Hunting in the remaining portions of the region (Baggs and South Rock Springs herds) will be fair.

Most seasons in the region are conservative 8 to 14 day antlered deer seasons, with limited opportunity to hunt does. Season length varies by observed buck ratios. Hunters should expect to see fewer yearlings and 4-5 year old males in the Uinta, Baggs, and southern Wyoming Range due to last winter's losses and those from 2007-08. Buck ratios remain fair in these three herds, but declined somewhat in response to winter losses. Given we are permitting very limited (Areas 102, 131, 132, 133, 168) or no (Areas 82, 101, 134, 135) doe-fawn harvest in Green River mule deer herds, maximum herd growth can occur under this management scenario. In some herds, fawn production for summer 2011 was impacted by the condition of doe deer following the winter. Fawn ratios look decent so far this year, but losses will likely increase due to drought.

Mule deer numbers continue to look fair in the central portions of the Green River Region in the South Rock Springs herd (Areas 101,102), although winter severity resulted in movement to Colorado for winter and above average mortality. The season in Area 102 will again be valid for any deer while antlered deer only are valid in Area 101. We continue to harvest a significant number of older aged class bucks in this herd (South Rock Springs), and the average age of bucks harvested continues to be good.

LARAMIE REGION

A mild winter and improved habitat conditions last year contributed to limited winter mortality this winter. However, drought conditions this summer may result in reduced antler growth. Several large wildfires in the Laramie Peak area have displaced mule deer and hunters should determine if their favorite locations are affected. If unseasonably warm temperatures persist during the first part of October, deer will be dispersed and hunters will have to hunt hard and may want to concentrate on higher elevation areas or timbered north facing slopes. Good buck ratios in the Laramie Mountains and Goshen Rim herds should benefit deer hunters this fall although access is always an issue in the eastern portions of the region. White-tailed deer hunting in southeast Wyoming should be good, especially for those hunters with access to private lands.

Localized reports of white-tailed deer mortality due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease have been received and may have reduced some herds in the Wheatland and Torrington areas. Deer hunters should also consider purchasing an antlerless elk tag in those areas where the elk population is increasing. Hunters pursuing deer in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madres should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has resulted in the deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. It would also be a good idea to have access to a chainsaw.

LANDER REGION

Mule deer populations have declined over the last couple of years due to poor fawn productivity. Of the 6 herds within the Lander Region where population size estimates were available, all were below objective after the 2011 hunting season. Overall, fawn ratios throughout the Region, with the exception of the Dubois and Sweetwater herd units, were down in 2011 compared to the previous 5 year average. Buck:doe ratios remained relatively stable in most herd units while in the Ferris herd unit the buck ratio increased.

Considering declining fawn productivity throughout much of the region coupled with extreme drought conditions, mule deer seasons are much more conservative in 2012. Hunters will experience shorter seasons, reduced doe/fawn licenses, and antler point restrictions. Continued any white-tailed deer seasons are in place in the Lander, Riverton, and Jeffrey City areas. No changes in license numbers were proposed for Nonresident Region E.

CASPER REGION

General license hunters will have an increasingly difficult time harvesting buck mule deer throughout the Casper Region this year. Following several years of poor fawn productivity, the number of mature bucks available to hunters has declined in much of the Region, especially on public lands where hunting pressure is heavy. For the most part, the already conservative seasons are relatively unchanged. The Department implemented a 3-point or better season in Area 10 this year, which will likely result in decreased hunter numbers and harvest success. Hunters in the Black Hills and Cheyenne River drainage will likely experience another year of tough mule deer hunting on both public and private lands. There are good quality bucks available, but their numbers are low. Proposed doe/fawn license issuance has been eliminated throughout much of the region, and remaining tags have sold out. To reduce hunting pressure, non-resident regional quotas were cut substantially in Regions B, D, and J where mule deer numbers have declined considerably. The Bates Hole area is popular among resident and non-resident hunters and continues to provide a fair general license hunting experience. One noteworthy proposed change for 2012 is the elimination of the ability for general license holders to archery hunt in Areas 22 and 34 given declining deer numbers and public concern. Overall, deer hunting on public land in general areas throughout the Casper Region will continue to be difficult with declining populations and buck numbers. Deer hunting in Areas 34 and 89 west of Casper should be good to excellent this year. Despite the extremely hot and dry spring and summer, antler growth is very good in 2012 as deer came out of the 2011-2012 winter in excellent shape. Hunters should expect to see some nice trophy bucks in these conservatively managed areas.

The epicenter of white-tailed deer range in Wyoming is the Black Hills. Public land hunting on the Black Hills National Forest continues to provide some reasonable hunting opportunity. Following harsh winter conditions in 2010-2011 and subsequent mediocre fawn production, white-tailed deer numbers have reached their lowest point since the late 1990's, so hunters

should expect to see fewer deer in the Black Hills. As a result, hunters will notice less nonresident Region A licenses were issued and the season in hunt areas 1, 2, & 3 will close Thanksgiving Day, November 22nd. Outside of the Black Hills, white-tailed deer are largely found on private lands along creeks and rivers. Please obtain permission to hunt in these areas before purchasing a white-tailed deer license or going afield.

PINEDALE REGION

Portions of two mule deer herds are managed in the Pinedale Region – the Sublette and Wyoming Range deer herds. The Sublette and Wyoming Range deer herds are two large populations with special management strategies designed to provide high quality hunting opportunities, older age class deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45:100). The Sublette Herd population decreased below the post-hunt population objective in 2004 following significant winter losses with fawn mortality estimated at 75% and adult mortality at 20%, combined with continued declines on the Mesa winter range (-56% from 2000 to 2011). This herd unit has remained below desired population objective levels since 2004. Despite improved spring moisture and improved shrub productivity from 2009 to 2011, deer losses were extreme from the 2010-2011 winter with an estimated 70 % fawn loss.

The goal of the 2012 hunting season for the Sublette mule deer herd (Hunt Areas 130, 138-142, 146, 150-156, 162) is to increase overall deer numbers and reduce buck harvest below the 5 year average (~1600). A standardized closing date (October 5th) for all general license hunting seasons in the Sublette herd unit was implemented in an attempt to spread out hunting pressure. Below average overwinter survival for fawns in 2011 will mean fewer 2-year old bucks (small 4-point deer) will be available during the 2012 hunting season. Due to significant winter losses in 2010-2011, overall population estimates for this herd unit remain well below the population objective of 32,000 animals.

The Wyoming Range deer herd (Hunt Areas 134, 135,143-145) is designated as a special management strategy herd which focuses on providing high quality hunting opportunities, mature age class deer, and high buck:doe ratios (30-45: 100). Deer numbers stabilized in 2011-2012 after above average winter mortality was observed in 2010-11. Good winter survival of all age and sex classes of deer was observed this spring. The mild winter conditions and early spring greenup resulted in significant antler growth in early April, which is at least one month earlier than two years ago. As a result, hunters may notice bucks with improved antler growth this hunting season.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 14 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. Youth license holders will be able to take any deer Oct. 1-14., while general license deer hunters will be able to take antlered only deer Oct. 1-12. General license, antlered only deer hunting will run from September 15 - October 5 for Hunt Areas 143-145.

The 2012 nonresident quotas for both Regions G and H are proposed to be reduced with 600 (-200) nonresident tags for Region G and 800 (-400) tags for Region H. Reducing nonresident quotas combined with fewer days to hunt on a general license should reduce overall buck harvest. This strategy should meet the “special” management criteria minimum of 30 bucks:100 does and maintain quality bucks in the population.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, an “any white-tailed deer” season will be offered for the 11th consecutive year. White-tailed deer numbers along many of the major river corridors appear to be stable to increasing. For 2012, a limited quota, type 3, license will be offered in hunt areas 138-140 and 142-143 from Oct. 1 to Nov. 30. This type 3 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

ELK

JACKSON REGION

General license seasons will again run from Sept.26 to Oct. 31 in the Fall Creek elk herd. In the early to mid-2000’s, this elk herd experienced several years of sustained population growth. Over the past 3 years, hunting seasons have been successful in reducing elk numbers toward desired levels. The 2012 hunting seasons will continue to focus harvest pressure on antlerless elk with additional Type 6 cow or calf only licenses that will be valid into November.

In the Afton herd, a significant change was implemented in 2008 in the lower Greys River. This strategy called for shortening the season in Hunt Area 89 in order to reduce the harvest on bull elk. This strategy will continue in 2012 with general license hunting valid from Oct.15 to Oct. 24. In Hunt Area 90, liberal seasons into November and increased limited quota cow or calf tags are again being proposed to address increasing elk numbers in the Upper Greys River.

Conservative hunting seasons are proposed for areas 70 -71, 79, and 81-83 to address low recruitment while trying to maintain bull numbers. In the southern portion of the herd unit in Areas 75,77,78, and 80, cow seasons are proposed to address elk populations that summer along the Snake River corridor in southern Grand Teton National Park and subdivisions in Hunt Area 78. Hunter opportunities in Area 78 were improved in 2011 when the area was expanded to include federal land west of Wilson to the top of Teton Pass. Hunt Area 75 and 79 type 1 (antlered elk) licenses were eliminated in 2012. Hunters will continue to have opportunities to hunt on the National Elk Refuge and in Area 75 with additional cow/calf licenses. The Department’s Hunter Management Access system will again be used to allocate permits for the National Elk Refuge. Hunting season changes in the Moran Junction area are proposed to reduce hunting pressure on the Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone elk. Areas 70, 71, and 79 will close on Nov. 4 this year. To address low calf:cow ratios and low recruitment in the Gros Ventre (Hunt Areas, 81-83), the shortened season length and antlered only spikes-excluded limitation will be maintained in 2012.

It is anticipated that the 2012 hunt season will focus hunting pressure on southern segments of the Jackson elk population that remain over objective. In addition, lower calf production observed over the past several years will continue to influence recruitment and contribute to an overall decline in population trend.

CODY REGION

The elk population on the west slope of the Bighorns remains healthy and growing, and should provide for a good opportunity to harvest an elk. Bull hunting should be good again for those hunters with a Type 1 tag in their pocket, depending on weather/snow conditions. More licenses and longer seasons for cows (extending into December) should help elk hunters in 2012. While the elk distribution in Area 41 over the past few years may have discouraged many hunters,

longer seasons should give hunters a better chance at connecting with an antlerless elk, especially if weather moves animals from private land. Both the South Bighorn (Hunt Areas 47-49) and Gooseberry elk herds (Hunt Areas 62-64) are doing well with additional cow/calf licenses in all hunt areas. Access in these hunt areas can be difficult, but Hunter Management Areas are available in some hunt areas which offer good hunting. Overall, there is ample opportunity for elk hunting in the southern Big Horn Basin.

In some areas near Cody elk numbers exceed management objectives and antlerless elk hunting opportunities have been increased. In other areas, decreased calf survival has reduced herd productivity and has required reductions in both antlered and antlerless harvest. In Hunt Areas 50, 51, 52, and 53 general license antlered elk seasons were replaced with a totally limited quota season in 2010 to reduce the harvest of bull elk. With less productive elk herds (fewer calves produced), the opportunity to harvest bulls is less than in previous years. Elk Hunt Areas currently doing quite well include Hunt Areas 54, 58, 59, 61, and 65, where elk numbers currently exceed management goals and seasons are designed to increase the harvest of antlerless elk in some places. Areas either near or below management goals include Hunt Areas 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, and 121. In these areas, seasons have been designed to either maintain or reduce the harvest of antlerless elk. Even though calf recruitment has dropped, elk numbers in Area 60 have increased. However, increased antlerless harvest in these areas in 2012 will begin to reduce these benefits

SHERIDAN REGION

Hunters who were successful in drawing one of the highly sought after limited quota any elk licenses for a hunt area in the Bighorn Mountains, the Rochelle Hills, or the Fortification will have the opportunity for a great hunt with the possibility of bringing home a real trophy. The limited quota any elk hunting season in Hunt Area 113 will be open this fall after being closed since 2010. Because potential hunters know there are some large bulls in this area it is one of the hardest licenses to draw in the state. For those hunters that did not draw a license there are still some leftover antlerless elk licenses available and residents can purchase a general license to hunt in Areas 36 and 37. Success for general license hunters and limited quota antlerless elk license hunters tends to be much lower than those who have a limited quota any elk license. In a small portion of Hunt Area 37, cow/calf hunting opened Sept. 1 and will run through Sept. 30. This season is designed to allow rifles hunters the opportunity to harvest an elk before they leave public land and hopefully redistribute some elk.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Elk numbers remain high and continue to increase across most of the region, with most populations remaining above objective. An above average hunting season is expected for elk hunters with increased licenses and longer hunting seasons.

The Steamboat or “Desert” elk herd (Area 100) remains near the population objective. Bull ratios remain high, which is a main management objective for this population. Average age of harvested bulls fell slightly last year, but plenty of older aged bulls remain. Flight data again suggests more opportunity can be offered while maintaining the quality of this herd. Both bull and cow-calf licenses were increased as a result of the flight data. Antlered and antlerless hunting opportunity was increased to maintain the population near objective. The quality of bulls harvested in this herd remains very good and this area continues to be extremely popular with hunters.

The West Green River herd (Areas 102-105) remains above objective. Hunting will again be liberal for antlerless elk to meet management objectives, while maintaining a shorter any elk season to promote higher bull:cow ratios.

Wyoming has significantly increased harvest pressure on the South Rock Springs herd (Areas 30-32) in recent years due to increased population. This interstate population is difficult to manage since elk move freely between Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah to escape hunting pressure. We will be reducing opportunity in this area for 2012 given recent population response to harvest, but hunting will be very good for those who do draw. Bull ratios remain high in this herd and many older-aged trophy class animals were harvested this past hunting season. In light of increasing elk numbers, competition with mule deer for limited fawning-calving habitat, and increased damage to the limited aspen communities in this area from elk, opportunity for elk will likely be increased as this herd begins to grow.

Hunting was liberalized in much of the Sierra Madre elk herd to address a population that has been significantly above objective for a number of years. Issues surrounding hunter density, access, road density, and perennially low bull ratios continue to plague the management of this population. We are proposing to increase harvest opportunity for antlerless elk in Areas 13, 15, 21, and 108 through a combination of general any elk (as opposed to the long term general antlered elk seasons), general antlerless, and additional cow-calf licenses.

Seasons in the Petition herd (Area 124) will be similar to last year, with an increase in bull hunting opportunity. We will continue to put the majority of the harvest pressure in this area on the female segment of the herd to limit population growth. This area is becoming a popular area with “trophy” bull hunters, which may complicate management in future years.

Elk hunting in the Uinta herd unit (Areas 106 and 107) continues to be affected by weather conditions, more so than other elk populations in this portion of Wyoming. This is a shared herd unit with Utah, and elk are often better distributed in Utah if weather does not force them to lower altitudes in Wyoming. Access is a concern in this herd, particularly in Area 106 where private lands are often leased to outfitters. This population is managed for 600 wintering elk to minimize damage to stored grass hay.

LARAMIE REGION

Several elk herds in the Laramie Region are above the designated population objectives. This will result in longer seasons and a mix of license types that should provide elk hunters in the Laramie region with excellent hunting opportunities. Several large wildfires in the Laramie Peak area have altered the habitat and may have displaced elk. Hunters who pursue elk in that area should determine if their favorite locations are affected. Elk have learned to avoid areas with high hunting pressure, but plenty of good elk hunting should be available off the beaten path. A few Private Land/Public Wildlife (PLPW) Hunter Management Areas provide access opportunities in the region but, as with other species, access to private lands is limited in many areas. Late season access will be available for antlerless elk hunters in Hunt Area 5 where the elk population is above the designated population objective. Hunters should consult the Game and Fish website to determine how best to take advantage of this opportunity. Hunters pursuing elk in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madres should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has

resulted in the deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. It would also be a good idea to have access to a chainsaw.

LANDER REGION

Like much of Wyoming, elk populations are doing exceptionally well across the Lander Region. Observed bull:cow ratios improved over most of central Wyoming, while calf survival was similar to previous years.

Favorable weather conditions during this fall's hunting seasons should result in excellent harvest rates and hunter success in all hunt areas. With elk herds above objective in almost all locations, all are being hunted at elevated levels to reduce populations toward management targets.

CASPER REGION

High elk numbers continue to provide outstanding elk hunting opportunities throughout the Casper Region. Nearly all elk areas in the Casper Region remain limited quota and season limitations including opening dates and season lengths are nearly identical to last year's. Elk hunters should continue to enjoy remarkable numbers of elk and good hunting success especially if the weather cooperates. Those hunters with general licenses should not plan to hunt in Converse, Niobrara, and Weston counties unless they have secured access to private lands known to have elk. Lands within these counties are not managed for a sustainable elk population, and elk only occur in isolated areas on private lands in Areas 126 and 129.

PINEDALE REGION

There are 4 elk herds managed in this region. Liberal seasons have been in place for several years and are designed to drive populations down to objective levels, while maintaining at least 20 bulls:100 cows in the post-hunt populations. A combination of mild temperatures and little moisture during much of the 2011 season continued to hamper hunter success in the Pinedale Region despite liberal hunting opportunities.

The Piney elk herd has exceeded the population objective over the last several years. In an effort to reduce this herd, liberal seasons are again planned for this elk population. Hunt areas 92 and 94 will open Oct. 1 for general license antlerless elk hunting and extend to Nov. 20. Type 6 cow or calf license quotas were increased by 50 in each hunt area and will also run to Nov. 20 to address surplus elk numbers.

Elk numbers in the Pinedale herd increased in 2011 despite hunting seasons that were designed to increase antlerless harvest and maintain present population levels. The 2012 seasons will allow "any" elk hunting for general license holders for both hunt areas 97 and 98 the entire month of October. Additional Limited Quota Type 6 licenses were increased by 25 in hunt area 97, and by 75 in hunt area 98.

The 2012 hunting season in the Hoback herd will eliminate general license antlerless elk hunting for the first 15 days in November in both hunt areas 86 and 87. This herd is being managed to provide recreational opportunities while maintaining quality bull:cow ratios, but the overall number of elk declined below population levels the past 3 years. Conservative antlered only seasons will be in place for hunt area 87 north of Hwy 189/191 to build elk numbers.

For the Upper Green River herd, 2012 hunting seasons will remain similar to 2011. This herd is at the stated objective of 2500 elk and to maintain it at present levels, additional Type 6 licenses will be available for hunt areas 95 and 96. This herd is managed with a combination of general and limited quota licenses to meet management objectives.

MOOSE

JACKSON REGION

The Targhee moose herd has been designated for special management and conservative hunting seasons will be maintained in 2012 in the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. Poor hunter success in 2011 and low calf:cow ratios are a concern in this herd unit. Hunting seasons in 2012 will offer 5 licenses for the combined Area 16 and 37.

The Jackson herd continues to be plagued with low calf:cow ratios, which has precluded any significant population growth and resulted in the elimination of antlerless tags for all hunt areas. License quotas in the Jackson Herd have decreased from a high of 495 in 1991 to 10 in 2012. In 2011, Hunt Areas 7, 14, 15, and 32 were closed because of low calf:cow ratios and declining population trends. Season proposals for 2012 will combine Hunt Areas 17 and 28 and offer 5 antlered moose licenses. In the upper Gros Ventre drainage, Hunt Area 18 will remain at 5 antlered moose tags. Conservative seasons are again proposed to address low calf:cow ratios, poor recruitment, and declining population trends.

In the Jackson portion of the Sublette moose herd, management is focusing on stabilizing moose numbers in Hunt Areas 10, 20, 21, and 23. Mature bulls are consistently being harvested and the opportunity to harvest a trophy class Shiras moose has increased in recent years, especially in Areas 10 and 21. Throughout all of these hunt areas the average antler spread continues to approach 40 inches. Because of the anticipated warm weather projected for this fall, hunters should plan on hunting when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding, at first light and early evening.

CODY REGION

Moose numbers in the Absaroka Mountains have declined due to the loss of cover and forage as a result of the 1988 wildfires and predation. Still, at current permit levels in Hunt Areas 9 and 11, hunters have been able to find mature bulls. The 2012 season should have average to high success on mature bulls.

SHERIDAN REGION

The Bighorn Mountains continues to have a thriving moose population. Limited quota moose licenses for any moose in Hunt Areas 1, 34, and 42/43 are some of the most highly sought after licenses in Wyoming. It is expected that there will be some large mature bulls harvested as some “trophies” have been observed during the summer of 2012. Although bull moose can be observed during the summer along roads and highways, soon after the hunting season begins many bulls head for deep cover making for a challenging hunt.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Field personnel remain concerned about moose numbers in the Uinta and Lincoln herd units, and the season will remain conservative in 2012 to reflect this. Field observations and the difficulty

of estimating moose numbers increases concerns over the current estimates. Documented disease concerns occur in these herds, and significant losses may well have occurred. Nearly 40% of moose tested in the Lincoln herd were positive for the parasite *Elaeophora schneideri* (carotid worm) and 33% of Uinta moose tested positive (although the sample from this herd was very low). Due to continuing questions concerning population status and potential increased impact to these populations by disease, moose hunting opportunity, especially for antlerless moose, has undergone a significant decline in SW Wyoming. No antlerless moose licenses will be offered in the Uinta or Lincoln moose herds.

LARAMIE REGION

For those hunters lucky enough to draw an Area 38/41 moose license, hunting should be excellent. This area in southeastern Wyoming is one of the premier moose areas in the nation. Moose are found scattered throughout the National Forest and adjacent areas and are very popular with wildlife viewers. Hunters should have no problem finding moose and ample opportunity exists to harvest a trophy bull for those people willing to venture away from roads. Good calf production in this herd often makes it difficult for antlerless moose hunters to locate a cow without a calf at her side. Hunters are encouraged to avoid highway corridors and popular tourist areas when pursuing their moose. Hunters pursuing moose in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madres should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has resulted in the deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. It would also be a good idea to have access to a chainsaw.

LANDER REGION

Populations in both of the Lander Region's moose herds are considerably below desired objective levels and continue to struggle. Although moose calf survival remained near average in 2011, overall herd performance and population size continue to be major concerns for department personnel.

Seasons for 2012 will be identical to those held in 2011 with one exception. In the Lander herd, Area 30 license holders will also be allowed in Area 2 from Nov. 1 through Nov. 20. Quotas remain the same in the Lander Region.

PINEDALE REGION

The Pinedale Region manages the majority of the Sublette moose herd unit to provide recreational opportunities and maintain high bull:cow ratios. The Sublette herd remains below postseason objectives (-9%) with a population estimate of 5000 and slow, steady growth since 2005. The 2012 seasons are targeted at maintaining quality bull ratios (+50:100) and increasing overall moose numbers. Since 2003, a total of 385 permits (-61%) were eliminated and have been successful in reversing the downward trend seen in this population.

BIGHORN SHEEP

JACKSON REGION

The last survey for Targhee sheep was March 2008, when a total of 96 sheep were classified (8 yearling rams, 22 adult rams, 51 ewes, 15 lambs). Sheep hunting opportunities for the Targhee herd will again be offered in 2012 with one resident and one nonresident license. From 2006 to 2011, one ram was harvested each year.

For the Jackson sheep herd, the 2012 hunting season proposes to maintain 12 licenses in Hunt Area 7. The average age of harvested rams was 6.5 years in 2011. The presence of 6 to 9 year old rams in the harvest and robust lamb production for the past 5 years indicates this population has rebounded following the 2001 pneumonia outbreak. Several ewe mortalities were detected during early summer 2012. Laboratory results indicate the sheep had pneumonia. Subsequent monitoring in July and August have not detected additional mortalities and it is likely the population experienced a low grade infection during the late winter and early spring. Summer surveys indicate production was high again this year (49 lambs:100 ewes). With seven consecutive years of high lamb ratios, ram numbers continue to increase and hunters should experience a good hunt this fall in Hunt Area 7.

A regulation change in the issuance of hunting licenses will allow the Darby Mountain (Hunt Area 24) herd to be hunted for the fifth year since the season was reopened in 2008. Surveys over the last four years have indicated that there are sufficient numbers of rams available to offer one license in 2012. That license will allow the hunter to take any ram from Sept. 1 through Oct. 31.

CODY REGION

Overall, sheep hunting in the Absaroka Mountains will be good in 2012. Hunter success was highest in Hunt Area 5, followed by Hunt Areas 3, 2, 4, and 1, ranging from 87% in Area 5 to about 50% in Area 1. Surveys revealed good overall numbers of sheep in all areas, and good ram:ewe ratios. However, low lamb production and survival may affect seasons in 4-5 years. This year's season should still be good for mature rams. Winter conditions during 2010-2011 significantly impacted sheep in Hunt Area 4, as these sheep reside year-round on high-elevation ranges. Permit levels will be reduced to maintain ram quality, but 2012 should still be a good year to hunt a ram. Hunt Area 5 will offer 20 ewe/lamb tags for the first time this year to concentrate harvest on some winter ranges where we have high densities of ewes and lambs. The potential for a disease outbreak increases with increased sheep densities, and reducing numbers in these areas should reduce this risk as well as reduce habitat overuse.

LARAMIE REGION

Bighorn sheep hunting in the Laramie Peak area was very good last fall and should be again this year. Ram ratios in Area 19 are very good and lamb production has increased the last three years. The future looks bright for this herd and hunters can expect to have a good opportunity to find a trophy ram. One resident and one nonresident license will be available for Hunt Areas 18 and 21 this fall. Sheep numbers are low in these two areas but the opportunity does exist to harvest an adult ram.

LANDER REGION

Lamb production continues to be poor in the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep population. It did increase in 2011, compared to 2010, and is close to the average from the past 5 years. Lamb productivity has been depressed in the herd unit for nearly 20 years and has certainly impacted population growth. There are still plenty of rams for the harvest so hunter success in 2012 shouldn't be impacted. The ram:ewe ratio in 2011 increased to 44:100 and is above the average of 30 rams:100 ewes in the herd. No changes in license quotas are slated for the 2012 hunting seasons in an effort to continue building quality into this herd.

Hunt Area 22 (Dubois Badlands) will once again be open for hunting any ram in 2012. Four licenses will be valid to hunt in Area 22 from Sept. 1-30. After Sept. 30, these licenses will also be valid in Hunt Area 5.

PINEDALE REGION

There is one sheep herd (Darby Mountain) plus a portion of the Whiskey Mountain herd managed by the Pinedale Region. A regulation change in the issuance of hunting licenses allowed the Darby Mountain (Hunt Area 24) herd to be hunted for the fifth time since 2008. A six year old ram was harvested in 2011. Surveys over the last five years have indicated that there are sufficient numbers of rams available to offer one license. That license will offer a resident hunter an opportunity to take any ram from Sept. 1 through Oct. 31. There are no proposed changes for the Whiskey Mountain Hunt Areas 8/23 and permit levels will remain at 12.

MOUNTAIN GOATS

JACKSON REGION

Hunt Area 2 encompasses the Palisades goat herd which is an extension of Idaho's Palisades mountain goat population that has expanded into Wyoming. This interstate goat population continues to migrate across state lines during annual movements to summer and winter ranges. A hunting season was initiated in 1999 with 4 permits. In 2005, permits were increased to 8 with the season running from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31. The same season structure is proposed for 2012.

An August 2012 aerial survey located over 100 goats on Wyoming summer ranges. During the 2010 hunting season several record book goats were taken in this herd unit, and there were several trophy class billies noted during surveys this year. Reproductive rates over the last few years indicate the population is productive and continues to remain well above the population objective. Hunters should expect to find goats in steep, rocky terrain with long trips of more than 10 miles away from any roads.

CODY REGION

Mountain goats in Hunt Area 1 are currently doing well and hunter success is generally 90-100%. Area 3 was added to increase opportunity for hunters to hunt a goat in hard to access backcountry with low densities of goats. Hunters are encouraged to harvest male mountain goats (billies), as mountain goat populations are generally not very productive and experience relatively high natural mortality. The 2012 season should again see high success rates in the Beartooth goat herd.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS – SMALL GAME

JACKSON REGION

Expect good hunting for ruffed and blue grouse in the Salt River Range, Wyoming Range, Teton Range, and Snake River Range. The mild spring resulted in good production for both species. In the past 3 years, cold, wet spring conditions resulted in poor initial nesting success but a strong renesting effort by ruffed grouse produced some good broods. Good berry crops in many areas should attract grouse broods.

Sage-grouse hunting season is closed in the Snake River drainage in the Jackson Region and that portion of the Pinedale Region in the Hoback Basin.

There is a healthy population of snowshoe hares within the Region, however, several areas of the Bridger Teton National Forest are closed to winter access beginning either Dec. 1 or Dec. 15. Hunters should check with the Bridger Teton National Forest for details of their winter travel plan.

CODY REGION

Upland game birds should be similar to last year, with vegetation left standing from last year providing good conditions for nesting. In the southern Basin chukar numbers will likely be down again in 2012 due to overall low bird numbers. Huns should again provide fair to good hunting throughout the Basin, while pheasant hunters should also enjoy some good hunting.

SHERIDAN REGION

Game bird hunters in the Sheridan Region during 2012 may have one of the best hunting seasons in recent years. The mild winter of 2011-12 and dry spring of 2012 appears to have allowed for good chick production. Reports have been received of people seeing more sharptailed grouse and gray partridge than they did last year. Blue grouse hunting on the Bighorn Mountains may be about average. Spring “lek” (breeding ground) surveys of sage grouse showed that sage grouse numbers were up only slightly in northeast Wyoming but still below long term averages. Wild turkey numbers vary throughout the region. In the Buffalo and Sheridan areas there were already large numbers of turkeys so with pretty good production it is expected there will be plenty of birds. Wild pheasants appear to be doing fine and pheasants from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department bird farm will again be released on several Sheridan Region Walk-In Areas. Hunters are reminded that most game bird hunting occurs on private land except for blue grouse hunting on the Bighorn Mountains and pheasant hunting on the WGFD Walk-In Areas.

GREEN RIVER REGION

Sage-grouse hunting in the Green River Region should be good throughout much of the region, although drought conditions have reduced production in the drier habitats. Observed chicks per hen has actually increased in areas that have received some limited moisture this year compared to the past two years. Mountain grouse (ruffed grouse and blue grouse) will vary by locality, although some pockets of fair hunting should occur.

Cottontail rabbits appear to be on the increase throughout some limited areas of the region, which will yield some fair to good hunting opportunities. Drought conditions have taken a toll on cottontails in some of the areas with more extreme drought conditions. Snowshoe hares, a species that receives very little harvest pressure in the Green River Region, are numerous in some

of the higher elevations of the southern Wyoming Range, Uinta, and Sierra Madre mountains, providing additional hunting opportunity.

LARAMIE REGION

Drought conditions this summer have resulted in habitat that is less than favorable for upland game birds. Sharp-tailed grouse numbers are down and an outbreak of botulism in the Downer pheasant farm may limit the number of birds available to stock Walk-In Areas. The number of wild pheasants fluctuates in relation to habitat quality so hunters should expect to find fewer wild birds this year. Cottontail rabbits and snowshoe hares are abundant throughout the Laramie Region. Reduced water levels in reservoirs and rivers may make waterfowl hunting more of a challenge this year.

LANDER REGION

The Lander Region will hold its eighth hunting season for wild turkeys in the fall 2012. In January 1988, department personnel trapped 41 wild turkeys on the 3T Ranch in Johnson County, Wyoming. These birds were subsequently released along the Wind River south of Boysen Reservoir in Fremont County. Since their release over 20 years ago, turkeys along the Wind River have moved between private lands and lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Currently, department personnel believe there are enough birds to support a limited hunting season. Due to major access constraints across the Wind River Indian Reservation, it will be extremely difficult for the general public to hunt these turkeys.

Seasons for other upland game birds will be similar to previous years. Overall, grouse (sage, blue, and ruffed) numbers remained stable during 2011. With severe drought conditions during the summer of 2012, it appears sage-grouse brood production is down.

The 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. shooting hours at Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, and the one-day youth hunt at Sand Mesa proved to be very popular with pheasant hunters and will be continued in 2012. This year's youth hunt will occur on Nov. 17. Bird farm pheasants will again be released at the Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Habitat Units through November

Cottontails, snowshoe hares, and red squirrels appear to down this year within the Lander Region. For those interested in pursuing these animals, hunting conditions should be fair to good in 2012.

CASPER REGION

Sage grouse numbers, based on lek counts, in the Casper Region continue to decline precipitously. This is likely due to the wet, cool weather experienced from 2007 – 2011 which likely impacted chick survival. In addition, West Nile Virus and other factors may have increased mortality of sage grouse, although this disease has not been confirmed in northeast Wyoming this year. Nevertheless, given the conservative seasons in place, grouse numbers should remain high enough to ensure those hunters that do pursue sage-grouse should not have much trouble filling their daily bag limits.

Blue grouse in the Casper Region may have been affected by the wet, cool spring in recent years, although anecdotal reports indicate chick production and survival may have improved over the

past two years. Their numbers will likely continue to be down compared to the good years but may be somewhat improved compared to the past couple of years.

Chukar and Hungarian partridge levels in the Casper Region are rebounding. Hunting should be improved in 2012. Good-sized coveys of huns have been reported in multiple areas throughout the Casper Region. Even in good years, hunters in the Casper Region should not expect to see chukars and huns in the densities that occur in the Bighorn Basin and areas around Buffalo and Sheridan.

Based on harvest and count data, turkeys in much of the Casper Region continue to do fair. Poultry production has been poor to moderate in recent years resulting in relatively stable turkey numbers. Due to substantial losses during the 2010-2011 winter, turkey numbers in the Black Hills will again be relatively poor this fall and in the spring of 2013 when compared to the good years. While hunting opportunities remain fair in the Black Hills, overall turkey numbers are considerably lower than they were during much of the preceding decade. Regardless, turkey hunting this fall on a general license should continue to be favorable throughout the Region as access to hunt them on private lands remains fair.

PINEDALE REGION

The 2012 upland game bird seasons for this region are similar to last year. Sage-grouse seasons will run late-September in an attempt to shift the hunt later in the fall and reduce the vulnerability of hens with broods.

Blue and ruffed grouse seasons are the same as in past years. Ruffed and blue grouse production has been variable throughout the region. The mild 2012 spring seems to have resulted in good production for both species.

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

CENTRAL FLYWAY OVERVIEW

The reduction in precipitation during spring and summer across most of central and eastern Wyoming has reduced the quality of habitat conditions for migratory game birds compared to the last two years. The poor habitat conditions will reduce hunting opportunities for migratory game birds. The overall impact of the dry and hot weather on migratory game bird production in Wyoming is unknown. However, mourning dove production typically is good during these weather conditions. Hunting success for all migratory game birds will depend on the chronology of bird migration and weather patterns between now and the end of the various hunting seasons. The reduction in surface water will reduce the state's ability to attract and hold migrating birds.

PACIFIC FLYWAY OVERVIEW

Water conditions and breeding habitat deteriorated markedly over most of Wyoming from the good conditions observed during the 2011 summer. Breeding duck surveys are not currently conducted in Wyoming but brood production is expected to decline except on managed wetlands. As a result, hunting success for migratory game birds, particularly locally-raised birds, may be lower. However, early season hunting should be good where birds concentrate near available water and irrigated farmlands. The liberal hunting season framework will be in effect in both the Central and Pacific flyway portions of Wyoming based on the continental status of duck

populations. Fall and early winter weather patterns often determine hunting success for Wyoming hunters by either pushing birds south into and through Wyoming or allowing many birds to stop in eastern Montana. In a mild fall, many mallards and Canada geese in the Central Flyway will shortstop farther north in the open water areas of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. The Pacific Flyway in Wyoming is not on a major migration corridor and hunting opportunity is primarily dependent upon local production and some movement of birds out of southwest Montana and Yellowstone National Park. Mourning dove production is typically good during warm, dry years and it is likely more doves were produced this year in Wyoming.

DUCKS

The number of ducks counted in the traditional breeding survey area of Canada and north-central US this year was the highest ever recorded – 48.6 million birds. This was largely due to excellent carryover from the prior year. Many of the ducks we hunt in the Central Flyway portion of Wyoming are raised in Alberta where the number of ponds counted in May decreased 26% compared to the prior year's count. The number of ponds in Montana and the Western Dakotas decreased to an even greater extent, by 56%. The breeding duck estimate in southern Alberta increased 11%, but declined 21 % in Montana and the Western Dakotas. The outlook for the duck migration into Wyoming looks very good based on a projected fall-flight index of 12.7 million mallards. However, poor wetland conditions in eastern Wyoming will reduce our ability to attract and hold ducks. As always, hunting success in Wyoming will be highly influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

DARK GEESE

Canada geese from three populations are found in Wyoming. Canada geese from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) occupy Wyoming west of the Continental Divide and are also found in western portions of the Central Flyway including the Big Horn Basin, Wind River Basin, and western Carbon and Natrona counties. Although there is some mixing of these populations, large Canada geese east of the RMP are from the Hi-line Population (HLP) and smaller Arctic-nesting from the Short Grass Prairie Population (SGPP). Although the spring population index for RMP geese increased 37% from last year the fall flight is expected to be average. In 2012, spring population surveys of HLP geese estimated the population at 494,400 geese, 80% higher than last year's estimate and a record high. The 2012 fall flight of HLP geese will likely be larger than last year. Production of SGPP geese in 2012 is expected to be above average resulting in a fall flight probably higher than in 2011. Hunting success for upland and migratory game birds increases with an increase in the number of young in the population of interest. Hunting success in Wyoming will be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

LIGHT GEESE

Most of the light geese that migrate through Wyoming are from the Western Central Flyway Population (WCFP). Historically, this population was predominately lesser snow geese, but Ross's geese now represent nearly a third of the population. During the 2012 breeding ground surveys, 205,300 geese were counted reflecting a 5% increase from the number counted in 2011. WCFP snow goose production in 2012 is expected to be above average, good news after several consecutive years of below-average production. Snow and Ross' geese typically bypass Wyoming during the fall migration with only small groups sporadically encountered. The majority of the hunting takes place during the spring Conservation Order, when up to 100,000

light geese stage in southeast Wyoming. Hunting success will increase with a higher proportion of inexperienced juvenile birds in the fall flight. Hunting success will also be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

SNIPE

Based on data from the North American breeding bird survey, snipe populations increased in Wyoming from 1966-2010, and were stable throughout the United States and Canada over the same period. However, the impact of the 2012 drought could reduce snipe hunting opportunities in shallow wetland and riparian areas.

RAILS

Based on the most recent data from the North American breeding bird survey, Virginia rail populations have generally increased in Wyoming, the United States, and Canada from 1966-2010. During the same period, sora rails increased in Wyoming and the United States, but decreased in Canada. Soras are the most abundant and widely distributed of the North American rails. The drought's impact on surface water could reduce rail hunting opportunities.

MOURNING DOVES

Based on the Call-Count Survey, the number of mourning doves heard in Wyoming has declined over the 1966-2012 period. Although the count of breeding mourning doves declined, dove production should have improved this year and hunting success will likely be comparable to that of previous years. The drought's impact on surface water and seed production could affect hunting opportunities in some areas. Locally-raised doves usually migrate out of the state with the first significant cold snap, which can happen anytime from late August through mid-September.

SANDHILL CRANES

The cranes that occur in Crane Hunt Area 7 are primarily birds from the Mid-Continent Population (MCP) of sandhill cranes. Annual indices to abundance of the MCP sandhill cranes have been relatively stable since the early 1980s and above the established population objective of 349,000 – 472,000. The spring 2012 index, in the Central Platte River Valley of Nebraska, was significantly lower than the previous 5 years likely due to later timing of the survey period and an early spring migration. The majority of this population overfly Wyoming during migration. Locating MCP sandhill cranes on the ground is the key to hunting success.

The cranes that occur in Hunt Areas 1-6 in central and western Wyoming are from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP). The fall 2011 pre-migration survey for the RMP resulted in a count of 17,494 cranes and a 3-year average of 19,626 sandhill cranes, which is within the established population objective of 17,000 – 21,000. It is too early to gauge sandhill crane production in western Wyoming. The mild spring should be conducive to good survival of juveniles, which is always relatively low for this species. Cranes will begin concentrating on fall staging areas in mid to late August. The RMP crane population has been increasing in recent years but poor production in 2011 contributed to a drop in the 2011 fall crane survey count. As a result, the harvest allocation decreased for all participating states, including Wyoming. In 2012 60 less permits will be available to Wyoming hunters. We anticipate about 140 cranes will be harvested in Wyoming in 2012 compared to 161 in 2011.

Cranes in Areas 4 and 6 roost and feed in the same general locations every year. These areas in Hunt Area 6 are north of Worland, the Otto area, Powell to Ralston, and Ralston Reservoir. In Hunt Area 4 scout Hidden Valley, Riverview Valley, and the south side of Ocean Lake.